

AMORPHOUS FORMS OF SANDSTONE PIPES IMPORTANT TOOLS IN LATE PREHISTORIC SOCIETIES

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All that appears is not gold (but still may be valuable). This old time adage might describe the group of primitive looking pipes featured in this article. To ascertain why prehistoric crafters would have sculpted pipes lacking aesthetic appeal or with only basic features one has to focus on their functions. Pipe smoking was a well accepted and apparently popular leisure time and habit influenced activity in the sedentary communities of the Late Prehistoric Period (circa 1000AD to 1650AD). These pipes, because of their design and construction characteristics plus their oversized drilled cavities, are usually classified as artifacts of this late prehistoric era.

More easily identified were the sometimes large contemporaneous effigy pipes of the period some with detailed decorative elements. This group of pipes was probably reserved for use during special activities such as ritual events. Most were more finished looking with design features suitable for pleadings to certain spiritual forces. These pipes, on the other hand, may also have been part of such activities. More likely they were primarily smoked for personal pleasure.

By the late prehistoric era settled societies had perfected the cultivation and exploitation of some local botanical materials including tobacco known to have narcotic qualities. These ingredients, sometimes in combination, were used for pipe smoking. The sometimes hallucinogenic materials produced trance-like episodes especially appropriate for either personal enjoyment or spiritual pleadings. The elixirs may have also helped to ameliorate medical issues. Among the intoxicating substances used in the pipe chambers were ground up sumac or barberry leaves and the inner bark of soft wooded trees such as willows, sometimes in a mixture with native wild tobacco leaves.

The natives' addiction to pipe smoking coupled with the expected effects from the experience likely led to the exploitation of more durable and practical smoking devices devoid of refinements. The pictured pipes may have satisfied this objective even if they didn't promote the sculpting skills of their makers. These same artists were probably responsible for some of the more detailed pipes used during ritual smoking events and special occasions. Some of the latter pipes were effigy impersonations sculpted in the round some with unusual anthropomorphic features.

Shown are four examples of primitive looking unadorned pipes. All have sizable

bowl and stem cavities. Although they are described as crude sculptures they may in fact have features rudely suggestive of effigy impersonations. These pipes, because of their ample material capacities, could have been used communally, possibly by a clan or extended family group where multiple individuals could share their insights and at the same time experiencing the intoxicating smoking experience. These pipes would have extended their owners' smoking episodes and the resulting pleasurable impact. They were durable serviceable tools that could be maintained without any special provisions for their protection.

This variety of pipes is both similar and distinctive in several ways. They all have conically shaped stem and bowl shapes that virtually meet at a right angle in an elbow configuration. Their stem cavities are angled slightly upwardly and were probably designed to accommodate tapered hollow wooden stems. Sticky substances such as pitch were used to secure these additions. The pipes display flat amorphous looking profiles. Several have additional features such as concavities or handholds on each side. These pipes are flat on the bottom which suggests they might have been adapted for use while seated. One specimen has a purposeful cupstone-like circular cavity in its base. This feature is sometimes seen in this family of pipes and could indicate either their multi-functional use or perhaps in some type of ritual observance. The ground surfaces of the pictured specimens are only roughly smoothed or somewhat polished. The pipe at the left of Figure 2 may represent a three dimensional effigy. The prominent carved adornment is suggestive of the body of a headless human or animal figure.

Figure 1 shows two sandstone pipes. The example on the left is about 3 1/2" long and 2" high. It has an oversized bowl which is tapered and conical with a noticeable constriction at the bottom at its



Figure 1 (Gehlbach) Two amorphous-looking sandstone pipes from northern Kentucky and Warren County, Ohio.



Figure 2 (Gehlbach) Two amorphous-looking sandstone pipes From Berrian County, Michigan and Delaware County, Ohio.

connection with the stem. Both the stem and bowl cavity excavations have been smoothed out. The surfaces of the pipe are somewhat polished. It was found in northern Kentucky. The sandstone specimen to its right is quite large, measuring 5" by 2 3/4". Its prominent feature is its tapered body, perhaps the primitive representation of an effigy's head. While it is only roughly smoothed over on its surface, its stem and bowl cavities are polished. Other features are absent. It was recovered in Warren County, Ohio.

Figure 2, left, is the previously referenced example with an apparent human or animal body carved on top of its base. Its stem and bowl configurations are similar to the first example in Figure 1. The pipe measures 3 3/4" long and about 2 3/4" high. This example exhibits an unusually extensive amount of patina in its bowl and displays the indented hand holds on each side and on its base. It is from Berrian County, Michigan. The pipe to its right has a more squat looking appearance than the others. It was made from Berea sandstone and was found in Delaware County, Ohio. Its dimensions are 2 1/4" by 2 1/4". The stem and bowl cavities meet at an obtuse angle rather than the almost right angle connection of the others. The cavities are also similarly sized and are conically shaped. This specimen has a cupstone or nutting stone type depression on the bottom suggesting its multi purpose use during its life.

These pipes, while probably not capturing the viewer's admiration, likely were important utilitarian and/or ritual smoking instruments. The settled lifestyles of natives in the late prehistoric period included a major investment in both leisure and ritual smoking activities.